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7 September 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ACTING AD/NE

SUBJECT: Post Mortems

1. With respect to [] memorandum to you of 2 September on the above subject, I hope that we are not going to let our desire for "efficient" and "expeditious" procedures obscure our judgment as to substantive needs. As you know, the main reason why our performance on post mortems has been so poor is that neither staff nor Board has, or has had, any confidence in the value of the present procedure. I hate to see us get in the rut of "formalizing" a procedure of questionable value merely in order to make sure that the IAC will not feel we are reneging on our commitments.

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2. Everyone is agreed that post mortems are a good thing. No one has yet made a case that a semi-annual or annual composite post mortem is of much use. A mere reading of the last published effort should show that it is neither a guide for collection nor a real statement of deficiencies. Important points become obscured by being tossed in the post with a mass of negative observations on other papers. We adopted this procedure primarily because we did not want to go through individual post mortems on every estimate, when in most cases such a post mortem was not required.

3. It is bad business in my view to institute a procedure which most Staff members will carry through half-heartedly. It is also unnecessary to accept IAC acquiescence in the present procedure as an indication of firm IAC views. Therefore, I feel that we have both a need and an opportunity to institute a new procedure.

4. Since it is generally agreed that post mortems are a good thing in those instances where real gaps are revealed, why not have a procedure which calls for them only where required? Such a procedure obviates the need for a routine formalistic semi-annual exercise. Any IAC agency (including ourselves) should be invited to ask for a post mortem wherever it seems required (thus placing some of the burden back on the IAC agencies). Whenever such a post mortem is asked for, the requesting agency should submit to O/NE a memorandum outlining their concerns, and O/NE could then prepare a draft post mortem which would go through the regular procedure.

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25X1 In addition, as a running check on post mortem needs, the O/NE Staff could prepare the post mortem cards on each estimate proposed by [redacted]. These would be reviewed in each case by the Board member charged with the NIE, who could then submit them to the Board if in his opinion, O/NE itself should request a post mortem.

5. In trying to run a high-powered operation with a small, select staff, O/NE has to avoid too many peripheral demands on Staff and Board time. I think most of the staff feel that the present post mortem procedure is more trouble than it is worth. Our task is to find a procedure which is worthwhile, not just to meet a "formal" requirement for a semi-annual paper of dubious use.

[redacted] 25X1
Acting Chief, Estimates Staff

cc: [redacted] 25X1

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